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SUBJECT: Outreach in Djibouti -- Out of Step with Needs?

1.(U) This is an action request; see paragraph 10.

12. (U) SUMMARY: The lack of resources to address English language education is a serious detriment to public outreach in Djibouti. An extremely weak civil society and lack of technology limits Post's ability to pair with local partners for the reliable and successful administration of existing Department of State English language programs. A critical key to public outreach in this country, across class, tribe and gender, is English language education. Unfortunately, Embassy Djibouti is currently ill equipped to address this need on a large scale. END SUMMARY

13. (U) While Djibouti is considered an ally in the War on Terror and a moderate nation, it is also 99 percent Muslim, an Arab League Member and rated "high" by the US government for transnational terrorism. It has porous borders and is located in the infamously rough neighborhood of the Horn of Africa, which also includes Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Yemen and Sudan. More than 50 percent of Djibouti's population is under the age of 25, and 40 percent of its citizens live below the poverty line. The country has seen an increase in Wahabbist activity and influence since independence from France in 1977 and is in need of effective outreach.

14. (U) Although there are tribal, ethnic and class divisions, a unifying feature of Djiboutian society is the desire to learn English, which is considered the language of the world market and the key to relations with most other nations. Contacts have noted that even most regional business is conducted in English, due to differences in Arabic dialects and the country's geographic isolation from other Francophone countries. An unofficial poll at Post found officers have been approached about English language education from an astounding range of sources, including officials at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, police officers, members of the Chamber of Commerce, herders in villages, high school students and even a khat seller on the street.

15. (U) There is no formal system for learning English in Djibouti. The English teachers who do exist often have language skills that do not exceed the State Department language rating of 1+/2, as evidenced recently during a workshop on teaching methods jointly organized by Post's Public Diplomacy Office and the English Teacher's Association of Djibouti. Even those who do acquire rudimentary English skills have difficulty advancing them, due to extreme poverty and a lack of scholarships or other financial assistance for higher education. There is no public library in Djibouti.

16. (U) While the need for Embassy outreach via English language education is clear, the lack of a developed civil society and limited human resources at Post, pose an enormous challenge. While other small Posts have partner institutions for American Corners and other English language projects, Djibouti's weak institutions make locating trustworthy and reliable partners nearly impossible. The government, while willing to help, will not guarantee public access to English materials. For example, Post must regularly visit the country's only university to ensure that library materials we have donated are available for student use. Frequently we find them locked away and inaccessible and must appeal to the school administration to unlock the library's doors during school hours.

17. (U) Post's Public Diplomacy section, which is entering its second year of existence, has spent much of its time in institution building, with some notable successes. We are active with an English Club at the University and have established an English Language Laboratory there with EACTI funds. We have funded the start-up of the country's only independent press group, which is now publishing newspapers semi-regularly and in three languages. We have helped the English Teacher's Association lay the groundwork for financial solvency and are about to sign an American Corner's agreement with them for their newly established classroom space. We are in the midst of pursuing an International Visitors alumni group and an agreement to regularly air "Connect with English," (a Department of State English teaching video series) on local television. A focus

of 2005 is identifying partners to begin hosting English language conversation groups, which we hope to provide with native English speakers with the help of the Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa.

18. (U) In addition, other agencies at Post have addressed the English education question. The Department of Defense's U.S. Liaison Office has established a \$300, 000 language laboratory for the Djiboutian military, and USAID has facilitated the arrival of five teachers from the International Foundation of Education and Self-Help (IFESH), who are working at various schools in the capital. Despite all of our inter-agency progress, however, we believe there is still a long way to go.

19. (U) A variation on the American Corners theme would be an enormously successful tool in Djibouti. However, for Post to have confidence that its resources were being used properly, and that free and open access was being provided, it would require that we both rent the space for the Corners and hire a LES to manage it. French Cooperation currently operates a similar and enormously successful reading room in the capital which has about six tables and offers French-language periodicals and fiction and non-fiction books. Djiboutians can borrow books from the reading room for a marginal annual fee (about \$3 US for students; \$8 US for others). The reading room services approximately 500 Djiboutians each week, according to French Cooperation. COMMENT: This would also solve Post's need for publicly accessible programming space which is extremely limited now, due not only to security concerns but also to space constraints on the compound. (For example, until recently, our Political Officer's desk was located in a hallway due to lack of space). END COMMENT

110. (U) Action requested: Post requests a one-year grant to rent off-compound space for a reading room and to hire a temporary LES for management. At the end of the one-year trial the project can be evaluated for effectiveness with a set of criteria jointly developed by Post and Washington. If the project is deemed unsuccessful, resources will be donated to schools and local associations via the Public Diplomacy grants program.